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## An Outline of

# The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey

**Bernadette Roberts**

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## [Comments on the Outline of The Experience of No-Self](#)

### [Bernadette Roberts and The Loss of Self](#)

[Bernadette's Friends Blog](#) - the tone is that Roberts feels her work has been force-fit into the teaching of nonduality, so this is an important contribution to consider.

**Discussion of Bernadette Roberts in the Nonduality Salon**, June 15 to June 20, 2008. Begins with [this post](#).

**[Bernadette Roberts discussed in some depth at Shalom Place, including further useful links](#)**

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## And outline of

# The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey

**Bernadette Roberts**

written by Jerry Katz

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## INTRODUCTION:

This work on nondual realization is a detailed report on growth beyond what may be called the final duality, or what Roberts calls the first of two distinct and separate movements in Christian contemplative tradition.

The first contemplative movement is described as union of the self with God, where God is the "still-point and axis" of being. In the first movement, self is not yet lost, but functions as a higher self in its union with God. The sense of personal selfhood remains. Abiding in God remains. Being centered in God remains. The divine life remains. God and self remain.

But in the second contemplative movement, self and God fall away, and "that" remains. Union with God gives way to God beyond union. The mind becomes fixed in the permanent now. The self's union with God transcends itself.

"Here now," Roberts says, "begins the journey beyond union, beyond self and God, a journey into the silent and still regions of the unknown."

So begins the outline of a detailed and revealing journey whose insights are fresh and capable of nudging a person toward a further understanding. It is also without reference to Eastern traditions and vocabulary, which makes it interesting and different.

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## Chapter 1

Roberts describes a quality of silence she had known on occasions, which was so total as to evoke fear, annihilation, point of no return. Always she would return to her usual self, warding off the fear through willful thoughts of God, thus breaking the silence.

One day, however, that silence could not be broken, for the fear did not come. And so there was no reason to return to the relationship between

self and God.

Roberts simply remained in that great silence.

For 8 days the silence rendered her almost unable to function. There were moments of exhaustion and near black-out. Every chore had to be done with great attention to every detail.

By the 9th day, Roberts was able to function as usual, but she noticed a part of her mind had closed down. She had become emptied of the past and come to live in the present moment.

Trying to understand that silence, Roberts first perceived it to be a kind of absorption into God. Then, after a month, she revised her perception to be one of "seeing", a kind of opening-up, not a closing down.

She soon discarded that perception and decided to research the works of John of the Cross. There she found nothing describing her experience.

Coming home that day from the library, Roberts turned her gaze inward and saw there was no longer a center, no longer a self. There was emptiness. She felt great joy and lightness with this knowledge. She decided that this emptiness and joy was Christ. She could live forever with that. However, further annihilation was in the cards.

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## Chapter 2

After a while, the joy of the emptiness began to wane and Roberts sought to rejuvenate it by spending time alone, simply gazing into the emptiness, which she was still sure was God.

On one such occasion, the emptiness expanded rapidly and every sense of life became drained from her. The realization that came was: "When there is no personal self, there is also no personal God."

This marked the end of an interior spiritual life, as well as any other kind of life. Roberts felt now that she was on an unknown path, lifeless, yet she recognized life all around her. She intensely felt the need to be in nature, as life at home was too routine and lifeless.

Though she found herself in the midst of life during her time of the day she spent in nature, she still had to deal with an intense emptiness.

In a matter of days another realization arrived, a new way of perceiving

reality: "God of life was not IN anything, it was just the reverse: everything was IN God."

At this point, Roberts comments on the limitations of language: "One thing is for sure: as long as we are caught up in words, definitions, and all that the mind wants to cling to, we can never see how it works. And until we can go beyond our notions regarding the true nature of life we will never realize how totally secure we really are and how all the fighting for individual survival and self-security is a waste of energy."

Roberts further comments on insights gained. She says insights or realizations are often polluted by being brought to personal experience, conditionings, ideas, and to frames of reference.

The secret to allowing an insight to become a permanent perspective, she offers, is to not touch it or think about it, but to flow with it. Once an insight is released from a frame of reference (and, most especially, from the frame of reference that it must be released from the frame of reference), the insight or realization is free to become permanent.

About two weeks following the insight that everything is in God, Roberts' perception of the world changed. She now could see the Oneness of everything and could no longer see the separateness or individuality of things, only "THAT into which all separateness dissolves."

Having now transcended the personal and impersonal relationship with God, Roberts could say, "In truth then, God is neither personal nor impersonal, neither within nor without, but everywhere in general and nowhere in particular. Simply put: God is all that truly exists -- all, of course, but the self."

In the next chapter Roberts faces the duality of seeing Oneness and Oneness itself. In other words, she does not stop at any insight. Her journey keeps taking her to, through, and beyond the core of any new realization.

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### Chapter 3

A mother of 4 teenagers, Roberts found management of her household no longer possible with the demise of her self and the subtle psychic energies necessary to maintain that self's integrity.

She found she required large blocks of silent time alone. So Roberts took to spending 5 months alone in the High Sierras. Speaking about this time in her life, she said, "Until I went to the mountains I had never

truly lived." And, "...it is life completely devoid of a single irrelevancy."

Roberts' hope during this time of solitude was to answer the question: "What is it that sees this Oneness everywhere?"

She discusses, again, how everything she gazes upon or attends to, is perceived as Oneness or God, recedes, blends, and disappears into that Oneness, even while retaining its individuality.

Roberts reveals that while she could focus upon objects around her and perceive this Oneness, she could never focus upon herself. She herself had no existence. There was only this quality of seeing.

Still, Roberts recognized a duality between the seeing and the Oneness. Additionally, as mentioned, there was the question of who is it that sees this Oneness. On top of this arose the question, Who is aware of the eye upon Oneness? Roberts knew the Oneness, but neither the eye nor the awareness of the eye. She did not know the no-self.

Regarding such questions, and regarding experience itself, Roberts learned during this time in the mountains, that time alone -- absent of questioning and valuing and thinking -- resolved all questions and reveals the truth behind all experiences, for what is true neither comes nor goes, but remains.

Roberts cites an experience demonstrating the importance of having no self and paying no attention to even the most stunning events.

During a moment of rest, Roberts was beholding a most scenic view of a valley and the surrounding hills. Now she noticed "a peculiar gathering of intensity in the air somewhere over the valley."

She describes it as electrical in intensity and exerting a magnetic pull. (The magnetic pull of Grace that Harsha recently spoke of?) This was at first seen to be the form of the familiar Oneness, except that it grew a thousand fold in intensity and was seen to be formless.

As it expanded, Roberts knew that to be drawn into the intensity would mean complete disintegration of the awareness of the eye that beheld this wonder. Yet she was frozen, motionless, unable to move.

At the last second, without effort, under the power and wisdom of the body itself, she would turn away from the intensity and in the direction of the forest and the continuation of the chores from which she had taken a break.

This experience occurred often in the mountains, and each time some intelligent bodily mechanism drove the "turning away."

Evaluating these experiences, Roberts knew she required the strength to fully enter the intensity, though she did not know what it was or how it could be gained. She was sure that whatever had brought her this far would also provide the strength to continue.

In the next chapter, Roberts describes entry into a terrifying void, and an apparently Kundalini experience which she calls "initiation."

Those who have known the ways of Kundalini, might already be able to identify the magnetic pull and the bodily intelligence as hallmarks of active Kundalini. Is she not describing the descent of Grace? Greater detail in the next chapter.

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## Chapter 4

The snows had arrived and it was time for Roberts to leave the mountain. Stopping at a campground, she noticed a change in her awareness. For now the Oneness was gone and emptiness had taken its place.

One morning she was walking along the beach and became aware that all of life was now nothingness, a void. She viewed this as hideous, insidious, monstrous, terrible.

Discovering she had no way to expel this vision -- because without a self there is no longer any defense mechanism against a life devoid of God, against seeing absolute nothingness -- Roberts simply waited for a movement of fear which would then re-activate the self. For, as Roberts discovered, fear and self were indistinguishable. The fear did not come. Roberts remained frozen.

At that moment of frozenness, she took to running on the beach. Then, unaware of any exhaustion, drove downtown and walked, trying to lose herself in the activity of a university downtown community.

She found herself glad that the young people around her had had a self, and she believed it to be the greatest blessing.

Roberts' next realization was that if there is no self and no God, the only thing we can trust is money or material goods.

Now Roberts' objective was to keep as busy as possible, and so she became very involved with her 4 children. Still, the impress of the frozen self was never far away from being known. All Roberts knew was

the immovable stillness within, as all that remained of the self that was. She saw her fate resting in this precarious balance between the stillness and the frozen nothingness.

Roberts tried to cancel an upcoming scheduled retreat at Big Sur, but all her excuses were neutralized by one of the Brothers who so much desired her presence. This happened to be the location of Roberts earlier realization that everything is IN God.

By the third or fourth day of retreat, the frozen nothingness appeared strongly, and she decided to face it.

At this point Roberts knew it only as a mental composite of such feelings as fear, terror, dread, insanity. She describes its form as unlocalized "darting tentacles of light."

Facing the "tentacles", she broke out in goose bumps and shuddered and her head grew so hot it felt on fire, and all she could see were stars. Then her feet froze, and the freezing spread upward, up her body, encompassing all but her head. She fell back, convulsing, her heart beating wildly.

Within there was no feeling, no fear, no movement of any kind, nothing happening. She says, "Physically, this thing was tearing me to pieces... All I wanted to do was get it over with -- to die if necessary."

Without being aware of the moment of passing of the event, Roberts was now only aware of a profound stillness absent of physical sensation.

She came out of the experience no longer having any sense of true existence. She regarded this event as an initiation and termed it "The Great Passageway," and describes it further in the next chapter.

Now Roberts came to see the body as ethereal in nature, absent an empirical existence. "Because form itself is composed of an unknowable, untouchable substance that remains permanent throughout all change, it seemed to me it was this substance that remained in the absence of self."

In the next chapter, Roberts journeys on, hearing an insistent inner voice telling her "Keep going! Move straight ahead! Don't stop for anything!"

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## Chapter 5

Roberts summarizes her journey so far, as consisting of 2 major changes.

First, the sense of an interior life, and all individuality, had fallen away, and there was only a turning outward and the seeing of Oneness, a seeing that lasted almost a year.

Second, the doing away of the Oneness, as described in the previous Chapter and termed "The Great Passageway." It is a state of total unknowing, an emptiness that no longer gave way to Oneness.

Accompanying this second major change was the sense that her

"brain was on fire or that some terrible pressure behind the eyes was forcing me to go blind. This relentless pressure in my head was like a terrible taskmaster constantly commanding me to 'See!...'"

Also by way of summary, Robert says

"I has no idea where I was or where I was going. If the first part of the journey was, in fact, the movement of self to no-self, this second half was the movement of no-self to nowhere..."

Roberts knew the danger of her condition and the potential slip into insanity and that no-self -- the unchanging stillness within -- was the source of survival. Along with this knowledge, she trusted the "taskmaster" to guide and complete the journey, with its insistent voice: "Keep going! Move straight ahead! Don't stop for anything!"

Perceiving danger in inactivity or non-doing, Roberts discovered and learned about the activity of the unknowing mind, the unthinking mind, in which there are no goals grasped, no satisfactions achieved, no compensation earned.

This non-compensatory period lasted 4 months, and was the worst part of "The Great Passageway." Roberts describes it as worse than a movement of purification and resolve, otherwise known as a Dark Night. "Rather," she says, "it is a radical state wherein the mind cannot dwell on anything known or unknown."

The saving grace of all this radical perception, in which all that was attended to bore no relativity, but became known as 'all that is' (much, perhaps, as an infant would perceive the world) was the conditional mind itself.

Roberts came to understand its importance, its integrity and purity in the midst of the spiritual journey. The conditioned mind was the key to her sanity.

Even this gave way to another understanding: that there was nobody left

to lose sanity. "There are no options and no outs, no death and no insanity; it's there and you're part of it, and that's what it is -- just a Passageway."

After 4 months, the emptiness of existence, the void, lost importance. Time alone seemed to take care of this. Now "doing" became important. Roberts noticed, at times, a sadness in people's living and searching, and in their expectations that an ultimate reality can be found and that it is linked purposefully to all their activity.

She had now known her life was a wasted search, a great hoax in which nothing was learned.

"If emptiness and nothingness is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then man is entitled to his self and his deceptions; he must have this compensation for an ultimate reality that turns out to be sheer nothingness."

What remained of Roberts' life now was not God, as she had trusted would be the case, but just what is, and the final acceptance of what is, and the doing of what has to be done moment to moment, and just the doing and nothing more.

"So this was the end of the line. I had finally come upon the great truth: that all was void, that self had merely filled the void, and that all man's words were empty labels forged by a mind that doesn't know a thing about its world and cannot tolerate a state of unknowing."

With this, Roberts could live as one must live, whether or not there is any truth at all. And so Roberts proceeded to live life, to "go out and make some money," she said.

Of course, this is not the end of the journey. In the next Chapter, The Great Passageway is marked by an ending, and Roberts finds herself teetering toward Isness.

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## Chapter 6

One day, while in nature, a smile came upon her face, and a sudden seeing occurred: "the smile itself, that which smiled, and that at which is smiled, were One."

Roberts saw those three smiles as a Trinity without division. This "grin of recognition" was not an insight, understanding or vision, but a natural seeing: that which remains when there is no self.

Life went on normally now. The Great Passageway was over. Really, it was seen that nothing had changed. The Taskmaster was gone. In the midst of day to day affairs was an effortless silence.

The after about a week, the void, the effortless silence, was replaced by a presence which could not be localized, which was neither subject nor object, but which was "seeing" itself. This was something that could not be looked at, because what it is cannot be known by the mind.

Now Roberts realized she had the key to seeing, which was not to look at all.

"It seems as long as the mind is viable it needs to enter into some form of understanding, otherwise the greatest revelation, while it would not go unnoticed, could not enter into the fullness of its human manifestation."

Now Roberts saw neither emptiness nor relationship, but what Is. And what Is is everything, but not the self. This marked the end of the Great Passageway.

It was followed by months of acclimating and the discovery of "doing," which is doing that is free of effort and maintenance, free of reflection, self-energy, self-will, or deliberation. "Doing" is activity that is not self-invested.

Knowing, seeing and doing make-up a single act, Roberts declares. "Doing" is without values, judgements and choices. It is a feeling of being on target, aligned with your true nature. It is not a sense of freedom, for who is there to be free? to chart a path? With "doing," what is known to do is known to do; it is there, and what is not known is not there.

Besides "doing," there was the second discovery of the silent mind, in which there is no experience of the mind at all, which is when there is no self or self-awareness at all.

Roberts saw clearly how "doing", along with the absence of willing or thinking, made room for the silent mind.

Many discoveries were made, and Roberts mentions a few. Esthetic values fell away, so that music now sounded like noise, and silence was more natural to listen to.

She also discovered the necessity of assuming some self-consciousness, in order to function in an acceptable way from day to day. For as self-consciousness falls away, awareness of the body as real, also

fades. It seems barely to exist, as all things teeter toward Isness.

Roberts now compares her journey to a felled tree whose sap still runs, and only slowly ceases, until what is left is what it is and has not a thing to do with the sap.

The uneasy part of it is that, as the sap or life goes, it is not renewed; there is no food or divinity to fill the void, and one must come to terms with this, says Roberts.

When acclimation to this occurred, Roberts realized, "that what is is truth itself and all that is," and that truth is known not by thought or experience, self or consciousness.

The end of her journey was marked by the dissolution of any difference between self and no-self, and the fading away of all the insights and knowledge and events described in this book. They had lost their relevance for this present moment.

In the next Chapter, Roberts talks about the very subtle nature of self, no-self and mind.

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## The Silent Mind

In this and the following sections of the book, Roberts addresses details of her journey. In this chapter she explores the further subtleties of self, no-self and mind.

She speaks of the mind no longer seeing itself as object to itself, no longer bending on itself, once self-consciousness has broken up. Neither the mind nor anything else can be attended to in the self-conscious way, for there is no 'other'.

A different type of knowing remains when the relative mind ceases to exist. It is the type of knowing that is not a knowing at all, for there is only Being. How can anything be known, when it is? How can the eye see itself? Or music hear itself? How can 'I' know 'that', when 'I' AM 'that'?

Roberts states that when we can no longer attend to the subject of our awareness, we have no consciousness of there being a subject. One question that arises is whether thinking goes on without a thinker. Roberts says that when there is no self, no self-consciousness, the conditioned mind functions at its full potential, and there is no longer reflection, introspection or the intrusion of feelings and biases.

Instead, "whatever is to be known is spontaneously there...in the now moment."

Therefore, thought goes on even when there is no self, no thinker.

But the most noticeable effect of the no-self, of the absence of self, according to Roberts, is the 'Silent Mind'. It is a permanent, unchanging silence, not the relative, variable silence of self-consciousness.

She reveals that the silence of no-self is a union or gathering of several types of silence she had known in her life. She recounts those varieties of silence, beginning at age 6, and makes it clear that they were transitory experiences, each of which served to prepare her for the next quality of silence.

Each preparatory silence, or "foretaste of an advanced state," as Roberts calls them, appears new, wondrous, divine and glorious at first, and then, through acclimation, becomes our ordinary state, Roberts points out.

And so we can never see our present state set against a former state. The result is a humbling and even a wondering of whether any growth has occurred at all.

She says, "...our true growth in this spiritual life -- which is the work of grace -- is imperceptible to consciousness, and imperceptible on a daily basis."

She sees these growths in the understanding of silence, as a stepwise entry into the state of no-self, wherein we are guided by a balance of self-preservation and self-extinction mechanisms, with the former predominant in the first half of life, and the latter in the second half.

With the extinction of self, we come upon no-self, which is beyond self, silence and every experience. Beyond no-self, Roberts speaks of the dissolution of 'that' which remains, or It, or no-self, as it consumes itself, or "draws back into Itself as if overcome by Its own intensity."

She describes, in this regard, a "fullness of act" which overcomes one, and which sees, at any moment, all of existence dissolved into what Is.

Roberts says, "I do not understand this mechanism, but I do know this dissolution, this enduring intensity, is the ending and the last of all silences."

The implications of that "fullness of act" deserve a separate post, which I shall compose, for they bear on 'not this, not this' and my own confessions in The Wild Song of Standing Free.

In the next Chapter, Roberts elaborates on further portions of her journey. I have been reading the scholarly Lists of Donmeh and Advaitin, and find Roberts confessions so refreshing compared to the rigid and dry scholarly offerings.

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## Questions and Comments

This Chapter takes a question/answer form toward further elaborating certain points of Roberts' journey. A few selections are summarized here.

Roberts notes a change in perception of Oneness. Initially that perception saw the giving way of the sensory to Oneness, or perception of individuality shifting to perception of Oneness.

At the end of the journey, the reverse takes place: the initial perception is of Oneness, and then that of separate form. Although with time, Roberts reports, form becomes harder and harder to see.

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Roberts also tells that despite the toll the journey had taken on her psyche and ability to function day-to-day, her friends noticed nothing unusual about her at all.

Roberts feels this is accounted for by her nature, preparation and temperament, being an extreme realist, a mother of four, and a contemplative familiar with and trusting in the ways of God.

On the practical level, there was no confusion, and on the impractical level there was disorder and confusion stabilized and neutralized by the existence of the now moment, the stillness of the mind.

Yet, even, while there is the now moment, it has its own time, Roberts says, and time is an important factor, as acclimation to the stages of the falling away of the self, is necessary.

\*\*\*\*\*

Next Roberts clarifies "doing." Though John of the Cross speaks of the "perfect act," which is an act of love prompted out of union with God, and which occurs as an outward flow no matter what a person is actually doing, whether sitting with a friend or doing the dishes. It is a giving that is the yield of union.

"Doing," however, as Roberts speaks of it, is not based on such a union,

therefore there is no outward flow created. "Doing" is not such an energy phenomenon depending upon two states: the self and God. "Doing" is identical to existence; it is without will.

Roberts compares this natural "doing" of the no-self to the "doing" that occurs in the bodies cells and organs.

\*\*\*\*\*

Moving to another subject, she talks about Christian experience for the first time in the book. She says Christian experience, with the help of God, both inwardly as stillness, and outwardly as the Eucharist, can lead to the self's union with God.

Roberts expressed the need to articulate and explore the journey from self to no-self. Even though such a description may not help someone in the midst of such a passage, a person will at least know that it exists and that is difficult, and requires time and acclimation.

She says Christ demonstrated this journey or passage from self to no-self through action, by ending his life on the cross. The road to a new life is not bliss; it is a complete and often difficult death, difficult for Christ, "the greatest of selves," and it is Christ's realistic message to those who would take the journey to no-self, Roberts says.

The next Chapter delves into the place of Christ in her journey.

## What is Christ (Part One)

Roberts tells that Christ was totally effaced and at the same time revealed in a new way. The Trinity disappeared. First came the loss of self. With loss of self, Christ dissolved into the still-point, or God within, or Holy Spirit. Then there was the loss of the Holy Spirit into the Father, or the One God. Then after nine months, this Oneness of One God became lost and a terrible void remained, beyond knowing and unknowing.

This void is the Passageway, a crucifixion in which Roberts heard a distant voice of Jesus asking God why he had abandoned him. Roberts says, "...here in this void of voids -- beyond self, union and a divine center -- I understood this man and knew exactly where he was at."

Resurrection, according to Roberts, is seeing "that" which remains when there is no self. It is God's knowing, not our knowing or unknowing. Prior to his crucifixion and resurrection, Christ's knowing was not totally divine, and so he referred to his Oneness with the Father, and could say, "I am God."

Christ was, therefore, human, and he required crucifixion and resurrection in order to know further spiritual growth. The resurrection is not oneness of the self with Christ or God, but oneness of Christ with God. "God IS Christ and only Christ," and that is the nature of man's oneness with God.

Roberts explains that Christ's journey reveals our own. Christ knew the first contemplative movement in the union of self with God. And Christ knew the second contemplative movement in his complete physical, psychological and ontological death.

So, Christ, too, knew the great void between the human and the divine, which is known as the Passageway to the resurrection. The resurrection is not the final step for Christ or any of us. There is Ascension, or the final dissolution into God, wherein, Roberts says, Christ is the Eternal Form out of which all multitudes arise and into which they all dissolve.

Roberts is convinced that few understand the meaning of Christ's death, and that failure to understand is, in her opinion, is the real tragedy of Christ's death. For to be forgiven is not sufficient; to have a liberated self, when Christ has no self, is not possible.

Roberts says, "To be forgiven is not enough; eventually there must be and end to the very need to be forgiven."

Christ demonstrates what we have to go through. He did not die for us. He mediates the dissolution of self; he IS the Passageway and the final seeing. At the end of the journey, Roberts says, one sees that "...it is ONLY Christ who dies and rises."

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## Where Is Christ? (Part Two)

The following is not an outline, but an excerpt of the last two pages of this chapter.

"Christ is not the self, but that which remains when there is no self. He is the form (the vessel) that is identical with the substance, and he is not multiple forms, but one Eternal form. Christ is the act, the manifestation and extension of God that is no separate from God. We cannot comprehend 'that' which acts or 'that' which smiles, but we all know the act-- the smile that is Christ himself. Thus Christ turns out to be all that is knowable about God, because without his acts, God could not be known. Act itself is God's revelation and this revelation

is not separate from God, but Is God himself. This I believe is what Christ would have us see; this is his completed message to man. But who can understand it?

"Complete understanding can only come at the end of the journey because full, complete understanding at the beginning would nullify any necessity of taking a journey. This is why we only came upon the full revelation of Christ at the end of the journey, and not at the beginning. What always struck me as unusual on this journey was that Christ seemed to have followed me, and not the other way around. It was only >after< certain experiences, or after I had come to a certain point, that Christ was revealed, but not during or beforehand. By coming 'after', however, Christ verified what had been lived through and shed light on its underlying reality -- his own Truth. It seems that nothing can be truly verified or honestly understood until it has first been lived, which is why the Christian journey is a lived reality and not merely an intellectual belief. In the end, the Christ's mystery and revelation only unfolds as much as we ourselves unfold; and if grace precedes, revelation follows."

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Roberts concludes this chapter by declaring that her Christian life, her entire journey, both revealed here and in her book previous to this in which the fulfillment of the first contemplative movement is described, has been an "on-going quest for an honest, absolutely truthful, final identification with Christ." This journey is complete once we see. Once we see that Christ is everywhere. Relative to that is the Holy Spirit or God-imminent or the I AM, and the Father or God-Transcendent or The Absolute. There is nowhere and no thing that Christ is not.

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Self

An Outline (Part One)

This is a complex chapter in which layers of insight blend and (con)fuse, only to find an attempt at separation in her next book: 'What is Self?'. Of course, that separation is attained by further layers of insight, but at least that way there's bound to be something for everyone.

By way of outline, I'll attempt to do some separation for the reader here, but expect to sense what I sense: that blending of layers of insight. Help from fellow Roberts watchers is openly sought! Here goes...

In discussing self, Roberts makes clear that her knowledge of self comes from the perspective of no-self. Traditionally, self is known by

not-self, which may otherwise be known as the personal unconscious or the collective unconscious.

She recognizes that her view of self is so different from that of the traditional view, that it may appear "incomprehensible and unacceptable."

The true object of consciousness, Roberts says, is consciousness. This is the knowing-self.

The other dimension composing the whole of consciousness is the feeling-self, in which the object of consciousness is the senses.

Roberts compares the nature of consciousness and the nature of the sensory system. The nature of consciousness is that of the self which arises from the reflexive action of the mind, or the action of the mind attending to itself. Out of this action the self arises, or thinker, doer, feeler arises. This is the knowing-self, consciousness attending to consciousness.

The sensory system looks not inward at itself, but outward to its environment, for which it stands ready to respond.

The problem here, Roberts declares, is that we may fail to distinguish between the self and sensory objects in the environment. This occurs because the sensory objects are not seen as they are; they are seen as filtered through the mind, and, therefore, as receivers of a stamp of subjectivity.

This problem exists as long as the self exists, as long as the mind bends on itself or attends to itself, as long as thinker, feeler, doer, stand together as self.

The difference between consciousness and the senses becomes clear once the self is no more, once the mind ceases to bend on itself.

Such was Roberts' experience. When the self disappeared into a void; when the mind could no longer attend to itself, or look within, the senses took over without falling into the same void as consciousness.

However, it was not only the self that had disappeared, but God too: the union forming the Divine Awareness aspect of consciousness had disappeared. Now it felt as though all life energy had been depleted.

This sense of life, she says, constitutes the feeling-self, which is subtle energy located at the center of consciousness or center of being, and whose existence depends upon the knowing-self, even as a planet

depends upon gravitational force for its placement.

It is these two divisions, the knowing self and feeling self, which form the whole of consciousness.

With the disappearance of self and God, the entire affective system of feeling and emotion disappeared, for it could not be kept in place any longer.

This disappearance of the affective system, and the recognition that it could not be resurrected, was the basis for Roberts' feelings of terror. Once confronted, however, the terror went away and never reappeared.

And Roberts then discovered that the stillness of no-self was not effected or moved by any terror or element of the unknown at all. She learned, too, that the mind is ineffectual without an affective system to work upon. And she came to see how the affective system itself is built around a hard-nut nucleus known as "the indefinable, personal sense of subjective energy and life."

Summarizing, Roberts says, "...self includes the entire affective emotional network of feelings from the most subtle unconscious stirrings of energy to the obvious extremes of passionate outbursts. Though separate from the cognitive system, the affective life so infiltrates the mind and all its processes that we can never separate our energies from the cognitive faculties as long as consciousness or self remains."

In the next portion of this chapter entitled Self, Roberts continues to develop and add to these layers of psycho-spiritual insight.

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## Self (Part Two)

Based upon her personal discovery, Roberts asserts that self includes the affective system of willing, feeling, emotion, as these are expressed along a spectrum of energy ranging from the subtle and unconscious, to the obvious outbursts of passion. This system is separate from the cognitive system, but it so greatly infiltrates the mind (cognitive system) and the entire mental apparatus, that these energies of the affective system cannot be separated from the cognitive faculties until the no-self is experienced.

Roberts states that the extent of infiltration by the affective system is hardly known, as we tend to believe we can be objective about it.

She looks further into the nature of the affective system. She says that a child feels before it thinks, and in time discovers the separation

between seer and seen, and becomes self-conscious. At this point, Roberts says, feelings become fused with knowing.

There is more to the understanding of self, she says, than being aware of self. There must be a sense of personal feeling behind it, which says, "this is me," "I am myself." This personal energy becomes a core feeling, or that which makes us human. And it claims all psychic and physical energy for its own. But it is only self, Roberts says, and "man is more than self, more than consciousness."

So when the reflexive mechanism, or self-consciousness, closes down or ceases to exist, the experience of psychic and physical energy goes as well; or at least they are not experienced as before. This results in a sense of weightlessness, of being detached from action, and this sense continues as long as one notices or chooses to remember life prior to the disappearance of self-consciousness, or the abilities of mind to bend upon itself. In time, Roberts says, she acclimated to the lack of feeling any energy.

Summarizing, Roberts says, "In the history of the self, then, physical energy comes first, the reflexive mechanism comes next and regards this energy as its own being. With this recognition a division is created between physical energy and what we will now call 'self-energy', will, mental or psychic energy, which some people believe is beyond the physical realm."

So now instead of only the energy of the body, there arises energy of the mind, "which resulted when the sense of personal energy infiltrated the cognitive system to energize its thoughts and acts."

Self, then, is not merely the thinking process; it is the doer, the experience of energy. Considering that self is the intimacy of connection between the reflexive mechanism (knowing-self) and the experience of energy (feeling-self), and that this intimacy is necessary for life, it is not conceivable, Roberts says, that self can bring about its demise.

"To think...self can get rid of itself is a contradiction," she says. "...when the time is ripe," there is no need of self. Self seems to outgrow its usefulness. This does not mark a falling back to an infantile form of life, but a leap forward, a seeing of what lies beyond the self, beyond the fulfilled human potential.

But because self cannot bring about its own demise, intervention by an outside agent is required. This intervention ideally occurs when one reaches the limit of human potential, for it is then when one may be able to live without a self.

Roberts concludes that self is the "way" by which one moves to a higher life. "Obviously, then," she says, "the purpose of having a self is to eventually go beyond it."

She compares the oneness of self with God, and the Oneness that remains when there is no self. The former is an experience relative to the experiences of fragmentation or lack of wholeness. The latter Oneness is non-relative, simply indescribable. Yet Roberts admits that a whole self, a self that is one with God, is a necessary preparation for the Oneness of no-self.

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### Self (Part Three)

This is dedicated to my friend David H.

So the core or seed of self "is our deepest experience of life and energy." Out of this seed grows the affective system, the feeling-self, the will, emotions and feelings.

Consider a board balanced on a fulcrum, like a child's seesaw ride, Roberts suggests. The fulcrum is the cognitive system, the knowing-self. The board is the affective system, the feeling self. The ends of the board represent the extremes of attraction and repulsion, while the part closest to the unmoving center represents subtle, unconscious movements.

Optimum stability exists at the center of the two systems. The non-contemplative one gains and maintains equilibrium despite forces that exist to unbalance the whole system.

The contemplative seeks to go a step further and move from awareness of the center point of equilibrium of the affective system, to the still point or true center of being (I AM).

Now the will is the center of the affective system, Roberts says, and the provider of energy for the affective system. Also, underlying the will is the still point or true center of being. So when the will does not move, or is free of desire, the affective system does not move, a state of desirelessness exists, and it is easier to access the still-point (I AM).

This center or will, can be known independent of the cognitive system, which also touches the center of the affective system.

Once the contemplative knows the still-point (IAM) and turns attention

there, the movement of the affective system comes to a stop, and there is a sense of stillness and peace.

The nature of this unitive state is union of human and divine will and power, so that will is now God's will, not contrary to that. Here is where one may become further tested by the world. Now situations arise that would test movement of the will, test the integrity of the unitive state. The requirement is for attention to be unceasingly on the still-point (I AM).

What Roberts learned is that while there was no more wavering from abidance at the still-point, no longer any tipping of the board symbolic of the affective system, there was still the movement of the ever-horizontal board up and down. This was Roberts way of saying that she was tested at her innermost core.

And what she observed and discovered was that there was a gap between herself and God. What demonstrated this gap was the initial spontaneous movements in response to life events. These movements were automatic and harmless, yet mystifying to Roberts, as she was not sure of their source, whether it was herself, or God, or some subtle instinct.

But these movements demonstrated that there was a gap between herself and God. Within that gap between the center of the board or affective continuum, and the still-point (I AM), was the battleground between the forces of self-preservation and self-extinction. This battleground appeared to be separate from consciousness and untouchable, not under one's control or will.

Seeing this battle for what it was, understanding it, the battle simply ceased. Roberts found that the initial spontaneous movements also stopped, and the still-point (I AM) was then able to further draw the affective system into its silence.

When the 'drawing' was complete, the continuum was no more, self was no more, and the still-point was no more. The gap between the still center of the affective continuum (self) and the still-point (God) was no more. Therefore, no self, no God there remained. Only what Is.

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### Self (Part Four of four)

The affective system, Roberts says, is the cause of all suffering. Out of it arises all fear, anxiety, and psychological suffering.

It would follow, she suggests, that those who have lost the affective system, are free of psychological disorders and would have no reason to

seek professional help, and that is why the psychiatric literature has no description of those who have gone beyond the self.

Among the questions that arise is the concern that the lack of an affective system might lead to lives that are cold, detached, robot-like. Roberts says that one has to live the no-self life to understand it.

She says, "All that need be said is that it is a dynamic, intense state of taking care of whatever arises in the now-moment. It is a continuous waking state in which the physical organism remains sensitive, responsive, and totally unimpaired. When fully adjusted to the dimension of no-self, nothing is found to be missing or wanting. It is only in the encounter with other selves that a self or affective system is a reminder of what >was<."

She says that one of the reasons people cannot imagine life without an affective system is that few grasp the whole picture of what the affective system is. It is not merely the extremes of love and hate. It is personal energy and will, and these giving rise to all desire, and these desires or expectations coloring our world, our thoughts and perceptions, our experiences, our spiritual experiences of love, bliss, lights, visions, sounds, ecstasies, etc.

It is all the self, the affective system. It is who we are fooled into believing who we are.

So when the affective system, our psychological familiarity, our spiritual feeling, our desires, our self, falls away, what is left to serve as a standard? There are no standards, no values, from the perspective of the no-self.

The no-self needs no values. It is already in the now moment. There are no options to consider, no standards to consult. The no-self is so empty that it is empty of love, bliss and joy, and empty of hate, sadness and evil. It is in the now moment. The practice of virtue is absent. Virtue is simply present. The bottom line is that the will, which is the core of the affective system, disappears, and it was will that had put virtue and vice into motion in the first place.

This was Roberts' major discovery about the self: "that its very nucleus is the will or volitional faculty." When the affective system first falls away, it is the will that abruptly goes, and later the emotions and feelings.

One of the difficult aspects of the journey, then, is acclimating to a lack of movement of the will, or the complete dissipation of personal

energy. That is why lifelessness and lack of energy were experienced by her along with the disappearance of the self.

In fact, much of Roberts' journey was the process of becoming accustomed to life without personal energy (or will) and without the experiences personal energy draws and gathers. And when personal energy is no more, perhaps, Roberts suggest, it is easier to see how there would be no results of that energy: no virtues, no vices.

So there is only living in the now moment, without feelings or practice of virtue, without struggling or the measuring of action. Roberts says, "Somehow each moment contains within itself the appropriate action for each tiny event in life without the need for thought or feeling."

She calls the preceding description, "doing." Because of the extreme condition out of which "doing" arises, it is very difficult to understand, and it raises many questions pertaining to ethics, morals, society, and so on.

>From all this, Roberts asserts, it follows that there is a better way of knowing a person than by the fruits of their actions (which sounds, and is, contrary to a Christian standard.) And that better way is by knowing God, and not by knowing the person at all.

For how can we know another when there is no self, no other, as such? And how, then, can there be a relationship? Again, this becomes very difficult to grasp as virtually everyone is dependent upon relationships, even those who have strong inner resources may not be strong enough to be independent (not absent) of relationships.

People who are dependent upon relationships tend to view life as an "I" and an "other" affair. The true Other, and therefore the true "I", is found by turning within, not outward toward another.

Once wholeness is won by the turning within, then one can withstand relationships with other people, be truly generous, and be conscious in love, wanting only growth for the other, whatever that may mean.

And what is the true Other? It is the still-point at the center of our being. "The real problem in life, then, is not between people, but between the individual and his true Other," says Roberts.

And so having found the Other, relationships are founded on That. We now love not the affective, emotional self of the one with whom we are in relationship, but the true Other, the still-point, God in others.

Roberts admits that is not so straightforward a seeing. First one must

face and see the individual. And, secondly, see God.

It is only after the self disappears that the self in others disappears, and that only God is seen in the other, and the individual fades into still-point awareness.

This sameness of seeing God, and the oneness of emotion is not as plain and boring as it sounds. Roberts points out that infinite varieties of shapes and forms are made out of the same clay. Even individuality exists in the absence of self. People with no self, and snowflakes, have no self.

What is really plain and boring, Roberts says, is the self, the emotions, self-identity, self-possession, the 'I am this', and the 'I am that'.

The life beyond the self is more free, open and diverse, as it is centered in the right place: the still point, the I AM.

Summarizing what she learned about the self, Roberts says that a self is necessary in order to know, feel, and experience. It protects us against death. It is necessary for survival and existence.

Just as self is developed, a time comes when it passes and fades away. This movement, all movement through all steps of growth, is the only thing that neither changes nor passes away.

The contemplative is one who is aware of the movement, first working at going with it, later discovering he is effortlessly moving with it, finally realizing that he is the movement Itself.

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## Conclusion

Roberts reveals that she had not taken her journey alone, but that her friend and neighbor Lucille, who was 85 at the time, had also undergone an experience of losing the self. Lucille understood it to be part of the aging process, a preparation for death. And the stages Lucille went through paralleled the experiences of Roberts.

The major differences were that Lucille's loss of self occurred slowly over a period of years, whereas Roberts' changes were abrupt and within a narrow time frame of two years; and that for Roberts the mystery lie in what remains when the self is gone, and for Lucille the mystery lie in how much of her self she could live without; and for Lucille, the complete loss of self meant presence in God and the end of her life, while for Roberts loss of self meant the beginning of life.

Roberts states the two broad views afforded by her spiritual journey. One is that the loss of self and the realization of what remains is the second part of a journey to God; The second view is that loss of self is a natural part of the life span, as one prepares to meet what lies beyond the self.

Whether the self is lost through the contemplative tradition or as the result of aging, what lies beyond the self invites one not to an end of any sort, but to a new beginning.

The contemplative's role in society, she believes, is to tell us about a transition or crossing over that each one of us will make, that some may be in the midst of making.

Roberts very briefly compares her experiences to those of the mystics. She says St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross had glimpses of the no-self and perceived them as transitory, not a doorway to the greatest depth.

Only Meister Eckhart, Roberts says, spoke of the step beyond union of self and God. Eckhart, she says, picked-up where St. Thomas Aquinas left off. She says the two should be studied together in order to gain knowledge of a full contemplative system.

The Spanish mystics, Roberts contends, in order to uphold theological propriety, revealed only as much as Thomistic or speculative confines would allow.

Roberts points out that the mystic depends upon the separation of God and self for his mysticism, for his oneness experience that he or she so values. But the no-self experience becomes the Only God experience, and with God eternally accessible, where is the mystical experience, the lights and visions? It is the end of the mystical life and the beginning of real life.

And that is what Roberts is talking about all along. She repeats that there is the theologically defined oneness of self with God, known in its highest category by the mystics; and there is "undefineable essential Oneness" beyond self and God, which theology does not deal with. It is the becoming of God, not merely the relationship with God. These are the two ways of seeing and knowing.

In concluding her book, Roberts states that it clears the ground for much more to be said about this contemplative movement of the loss of self and Divine Oneness.

She says she is concerned for others who may find themselves moving beyond the mystical union, beyond the union of self and God. And she feels it is a grave mistake to think that mystical union is the final stage.

She urges the mystic to release the experience of unity and all the feelings associated with it, and to move beyond. She urges that any self at all, even the divine self, must be released.

That crossing of the line into the unknown is done by God alone. The self never crosses the line, it simply ceases to exist. (Aside: it reminds of a mug I have that says upon it, "Old waitresses don't die, they just give up their stations.")

"For if truth be known," Roberts says, "only Christ dies and only Christ rises."

She quotes Matthew 10:39: "He who seeks only himself brings himself to ruin, whereas he who brings himself to naught for me discovers who he is."

Roberts adds that he will discover not only 'who' he is, but 'what', 'where', and 'that' he is, in God, and that outside God, nothing is.

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